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THE CEA CRITIC

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COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Program for the Annual Meeting, Washington, D. C.

December 28, 1956. 3:45 - 5:15 p.m. East Room, Mayflower Hotel

Theme: ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE:

IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS

Chairman: Donald J. Lloyd, Wayne State University

Speakers:

Oliver J. Caldwell, Assistant Commissioner for International Education, Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D. C.

Robert D. Kennedy, Chief, English Teaching Branch, Information Center Service, U. S. Information Agency, Washington.

Leo L. Rockwell, Director, Division of Arts and Letters, Colgate University.

Panel:

J. Manuel Espinosa, Chief, Professional Activities Division, International Educational Exchange Service, Department of State, Washington, D. C.

Alva L. Davis, Director, American Language Center, The American University, Washington, D. C.

James P. McCormick, Wayne State University.

Dr. Oliver J. Caldwell, assistant commissioner for international education in the Office of Education, as in China (where he was born) from 1935 to 1943 as a professor of English and a college official. After a period of service in the exchange program of the Department of State, he was advanced to his present important position in 1951. In recent years he has visited fifty countries on educational missions.

Robert D. Kennedy, chief of the English teaching branch of the U. S. Information Agency in Washington, taught modern languages in the state of Washington before going abroad in 1950 as a cultural affairs officer at Manila and later at

Saigon.

Dr. Leo L. Rockwell of Colgate University has had a distinguished career as a scholar and teacher of German, French, Spanish, and English. A student in foreign universities, he has also been a visiting professor in the National University of Chile. He served as director of the English language institute at Michigan and as an assistant editor of the *Early Modern English Dictionary*.

Dr. J. Manuel Espinosa of the State Department is currently abroad on a trip through Europe and Southeast Asia; he will bring back information of timely interest

we teach "big" books and use adequate abstractions to throw light upon them the world will welcome and recognize our contribution. The greatest books are the best books for they plunge us directly into the substance of life.

The meeting heard an informative presentation of the freshman English methods used at Amherst.

(Please Turn To Page 8)

New England CEA Fall Meeting

As a result of the able planning of Carvel Collins and his program committee the Oct. 27 meeting of the New England CEA at MIT was most effective.

Mark Van Doren gave an imaginative defense of the role of the English teacher: literature is one of the great subjects, which the world always has thought and always will think important; and if

Katherine Anne Porter's *Noon Wine*

(Paper Read at a C E A Meeting, Chicago, April, 1956)

Katherine Anne Porter's short novel, *Noon Wine*, is an especially rewarding work because it lends itself well to a form of dramatic exposition. Discussion of it involves the understanding of narrative pace, the challenge of sudden, violent and uncalculated action, and the agony of slow appraisal of one's acts. Miss Porter has here presented action in a meaningful context, has discussed and analyzed motive subtly and brilliantly, and has very solidly given a realistic context, from which the spare symbolism unobtrusively emerges from time to time.

Understanding and Maturity

A great advantage in this story lies in the apparent discretion of its narration. Students seem to me often to suffer from the severe necessity to discover symbolism before they have an accumulation of wisdom from which to judge experience. They are too often urged to discuss literature in terms of a discourse to which they have not yet accustomed themselves; or they

are inclined to operate in a series of symbolic equations which have too little real meaning to them.

These are often necessary risks the teacher of literature must take; he is always faced with several forms of intellectual and emotional immaturity. The range of reference in modern literature is so great that often the task of bringing literary discourse within reach of useful discussion does involve systems of interpretation that are artificial, or that must seem so to some students.

This is true partly because the teaching of literature is and invariably must be involved with intellectual "futures," with intangibles that are not actual but merely anticipatory. While I may often sense the degree of communication (or lack of it) with students in my teaching, I am never entirely sure of the exact nature of its complexity. A student, willing to move beyond his human limitations (or present limitations) by an act of the imagination or the understanding or both, is nevertheless forced

(Please turn to p. 6)

REVITALIZING THE HUMANITIES THROUGH AMERICAN LITERATURE

(Part of a paper read at the Spring, 1956 meeting of Southern California CEA.)

I will not dwell on the difficulties so apparent to all of us who teach the humanities today — the pressures of technical and vocational training, overcrowded classrooms, and students immersed in the present, too well adjusted to society, and untouched by liberal education. My own experience may differ somewhat from yours, but the same conditions prevail.

At UCLA our American survey draws almost 500 students per semester. The sections are nearly 100 each, all lecture. More than half of the students are victims of "the new illiteracy." Some cannot write an essay-examination which could be accepted in a good junior high school English course. Most of them have not been taught how to study or to read the simplest poetry or uncomplicated prose. How can we reach these students, even the best of them? How can we hold standards? How can we hope to impress them with the

intangible values of the humanities?

There Are Advantages

The temptation is strong to shrug off the problem. It is something for Congress or the Supreme Court—or at least the college administration. Entrance requirements are too low, John Dewey is to blame, it's the times, "Look at the juvenile delinquency rate!" But the fact remains. Classes will meet again next week. The problem must be faced for the time being, at least, in our classrooms.

And if the conditions seem hopeless, we must at the same time be determined to make them otherwise. Certain things are in our favor—those of us who teach American literature. We can count on some degree of acceptance for our subject in the emphasis on American history in high school. We can talk about American writers in a geographical and historical context to which the student feels he belongs. Without chauvinism, we can be patriotic.

(Please turn to p. 3, col. 3)

THE CEA CRITIC

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our organization by seeing to it
that their college libraries sub-
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year). This will increase our cir-
culation and will also enable us to
reach a wider audience among fac-
ulty and students.

Research Paper Topic

The usual research paper in the
composition course is a strain all
around. The student is trying to
learn the elements of bibliographic
method and to apply them in a
region where he is a beginner. The
instructor is trying to teach that
method and at the same time to
pose as an expert on subject matter
and sources in every department
of human knowledge.

Several years passed before it
dawned on me that the best sub-
jects for research might be the
subjects taught in the course it-
self. These, obviously, are language
and literature.

The teacher is presumably an
expert on these subjects, and can
give knowing guidance on source
materials. Instead of pretending to
be a fountainhead and critic on
discoveries in electronics and wonder
drugs and Assyrian sculpture, he can
really offer sound advice on
bibliographies for the study of
rhetoric and vocabulary and the
history of the English essay. And
the student can, in his individual
work, follow up questions that
have arisen during his previous
pursuit of the composition course.

Experiment with this idea over
several years has resulted in a
more hopeful outlook for me as
the time for the research assign-
ment rolls around. The interests
and previous knowledge of the
student can be consulted when he
seeks advice on a promising re-
search question. The College of
Agriculture lad might look for-
ward to a philological study on the
derivations of common plant
names. The bilingual freshman
might even make a contribution to
knowledge by tracing down some
Japanese loan words that have
passed into English use.

The following list should not be
considered as topics for a paper,
but merely areas in which a spec-
ific research question could be
found:

American vs. British English;
Bibliography, collecting a; Bio-
graphy, the writing of; Book re-
viewing; Business English; Dia-
lect; Dialog; Dictionaries; Euphemisms;
Grammar, aspects of; History,
the writing of; Idioms;
International languages; Journal-

Starting The Survey Course

I have found that one of the
first problems to appear during
the Survey Course of English Lit-
erature, and one which is likely
to hamper students if it is not
faced promptly, is the fact that
many students (in the case of my
classes, at least 50%) have taken
a survey course in senior high
school and complacently regard the
college course as a repetition which
will require little effort.

One way to offset this impres-
sion is to use part of the first
class meeting, which is so often
shortened to a mere taking of at-
tendance and listing of texts or
devoted to an elementary back-
ground lecture, for distributing a
sheet containing from thirty to
fifty names of fictional and poetic
characters (Adonais, Andrea del
Sarto, Pamela) phrases (the Ever-
lasting Yea, the willing suspension
of disbelief, the unco guid), and
background names (Fanny Brawne,
Elizabeth Siddal, William Hog-
arth), with the request that the stu-
dent indicate after each whether
he (a) is thoroughly familiar with
the name or phrase; (b) has a gen-
eral idea of its significance and
period or can at least guess at
them; (c) finds it entirely mean-
ingless.

To fill in this information takes
perhaps ten minutes; I then spend
another ten or fifteen minutes
drawing out student comments on
some of the terms.

This oral questioning serves
three purposes:

1. It breaks the ice for later
discussions. Our survey course
meets three times a week, the in-
tention being to provide two per-
iods of lecture and one of discus-
sion. If students can be led to
speak at the first meeting, they are
more likely to join discussions
later. Having the questionnaires
collected and on the instructor's
desk also enables him to call on

ism and English; Latin and Greek
roots in English; Legal language;
Localisms; Logic and language;
Neologisms; Pidgin and other jar-
gons; Place names; Plagiarism;
"Poetic diction"; Propaganda;
Proverbs; Radio language; Refer-
ence books for writers; Rumors;
Semantics, aspects of; Slang;
Spelling reform; Short story, his-
tory of American; "Style books"
for American usage; Textbooks
for English courses; "War words"
of twentieth century; Writing pro-
cess (psychology of composition).

A. Grove Day

Univ. of Hawaii

students who have indicated fam-
iliarity with poems and novels. (Of
course in some cases their ideas
are completely wrong; Fanny
Brawne is often confused with
Fanny Burney.) It also helps him
to call on students who are obvi-
ously weak in background but who
do know one or two answers. These
are the students most likely to need
encouragement. Nearly everyone,
for example, is familiar with Ivan-
hoe. Practically all can identify
James Boswell. Quite a few will
comment on Disraeli.

2. Since all of the students re-
cognize at least some of the terms,
all are encouraged to feel that they
are not entering an uncharted
wilderness. There is also the rather
slight possibility that their inter-
est in the future reading will be
aroused by the comments of
other students.

3. And finally, while some are
beginning to feel that they are not
completely ignorant, others are re-
alizing that it is two long years
or more since the senior high
school course and that they have
not really read all that English lit-
erature offers. Seldom will any
class member have heard of Mich-
el Beaupuy, Teufelsdroeckh, or Mrs.
Slipslop. Since few will recall the
Wedding-Guest, Elia, or Tony
Lumpkin, though it is very possible
they read The Ancient Mariner,
Charles Lamb's essays, and She
Stoops to Conquer, they learn that

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the memory is not as infallible as they had hoped. They are much more likely to have an open mind about what lies before them.

My own practice has been to glance over these first lists, and to keep them till the close of the semester. I then pass out the questionnaire blank again, and after it has been filled out, I return the original papers for comparison.

This serves two purposes:

1. It acts as a brief review of identifications and key phrases.

2. It always indicates a gain in objective learning. Everyone can recognize some terms he did not know before taking the course, and while this memory-stocking is not a high goal, to some students it does definitely represent attainment. It is an accomplishment on which the finger can be put, a tangible acquirement; I have seen a student who has worked slowly and not too successfully all semester put the second questionnaire into his pocket with a look of satisfaction instead of depression.

Ruth Aldrich

Univ. of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

FAREWELL TO CULTURE

Sound, symbol and sob
Sweetness shines aloud
Broods the brooder abroad
Bingo! the wheels go round!
Clackity clack go the dice
Softly now, Ulysses!
Where art thou, my Prufrock?

Alas, poor poet away
Love and Law, get lost!
Sunk to the dampered dirge
Lost to the heart of darkness
Where are the snows of the past?
The Snows of Kilimanjaro.

M. Henry Mondor

The Provincial, a new literary journal to appear every other month beginning in October, 1956, plans to publish textual, historical, philosophical, psychological, biographical, and comparative criticism. It will not "overly concern itself with schools and movements of writing and criticism, except as legitimate subject matter for essays." Subscriptions are \$1.00 a year. Address Box 8613, Richmond, Virginia.

Joseph Mersand is now teaching in the Schools of General Studies of Queens College and the College of the City of New York. He is chairman of the English Department of Jamaica High School and edited the 1955 Yearbook of the New York Society for the Experimental Study of Education.

ROCHESTER REVISITED

Dr. Schilling's account (CEA Critic, March, 1956) of the major concepts underlying the University of Rochester's Ph.D. program in English seems highly admirable in many respects. However, as an educationist I consider it my professional duty to set forth a few comments designed to improve the quality of the product.

The plan of "a substantial amount of supervised teaching experience" in the last two years is admirable and a concept fully implemented in too few graduate programs. But another assertion made by Professor Schilling just does not hold water. "You become a good teacher," he says, "by knowing something well yourself, by being well-trained in scholarship and learning through the example of good teachers of your own, and then by going and teaching yourself."

We must, it is true, know something well ourselves. We must be well-trained in scholarship, and certainly by actually teaching we grow professionally if we are reflective and, by being professional and not vocational, constantly evaluate our practice in terms of well-established theory. But we do not

learn through the example of good teachers until we have a thorough grounding in educational psychology, and this stage is likely to occur at just about the time we are ready to go out on our own.

Jean D. Grambs (see "The Sociology of the 'Born Teacher,'" p. 29, in *Readings in Education*, edited by Arthur Foff and Jean D. Grambs) has put the matter nicely, saying: "The average student, for instance, probably has had a minimum of eight different teachers in the elementary school, as many as 20 different teachers in high school. For those who go to college, they will react to another forty or so professors in their four undergraduate years. There is no lack of knowledge of the teacher, on the part of the person as a student. But it is a well known experience for the student to be completely unable to explain how the teacher helped him learn; what it was in the teaching situation that helped or hurt. Introspection on the part of students about the teaching process is very unrewarding; few students are able to get any real insight into what the teacher really did."

Chester S. Williams
University of Oklahoma

Teach Human Beings?

I'm somewhat concerned to find Allen Blow Cook saying "Don't try to teach Communications, or Ling-

istics, or English 1, or Composition, or Rhetoric; try to teach human beings" (Oct. CEA Critic).

Mr. Cook, it seems to me, has failed to distinguish between the dative and the accusative.

The Schools of Education, the natural enemies of English and the foreign languages, have been saying for years: "Teach the child instead of the subject."

One expects the Educationists to be unphilosophical in print and out. But if their non-thinking reaches the pages of *The CEA Critic*, the dragon is really riding St. George.

Francis Hayes
Univ. of Florida

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will rise to the bait. Instead we ought to stress what a disoriented and morally confused generation most badly needs—character, self-discipline, integrity, plain-living-and-high-thinking—central things which the American tradition, at its best, represents. At this time in history, when America is more than ever on trial before the nations of the world, we will do better in our classes to play down the rights and privileges of democracy and stress instead the responsibilities of the citizen, his duties, and his service to his fellow man. Social evils will persist, but as Emerson wrote in "The New England Reformers," "Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him."

The Quiet Mind

It is hard to know what we mean by 'the humanities.' But we can agree more readily on what they oppose. They stand opposed to the mass mind and the blunted sensibility. They are on alien ground in a world of syncopated toothpaste commercials, get-rich-quick quiz shows, and sales promotions of late model cars (why is it the newspaper criminals are always seen driving away in a late model car?). It is not too much to hope that through the works of Lowell or Melville or Emily Dickinson we could touch our students with the essence of the humane mind.

Robert Falk
UCLA

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WRITING AND SPEAKING FOR BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

What do business and industry expect from English instructors? How can the instructor adapt his teaching methods so that the student will receive the maximum benefit from his course in English? What do business and industry find to be the weaknesses of writers? What types of speech should be practiced by students who will enter business or industry?

To learn the answers to these questions, the writer sent a questionnaire to seventy engineering companies. Fifty were most cooperative and helpful in completing it. This paper does not assume that the elimination of faults in writing and speaking will make the educated man. It merely reports those facts which industry feels can be helpful to the instructors in English and speech. In addition, it offers an up-to-date picture of what is expected of writers in business and industry.

Specific Recommendations

In the writer's survey, seventy-five per cent of the companies stated that the lack of unity and logic, wordiness and repetition, and the lack of coherence are the most prominent weaknesses of the writers in business and industry. Ineffective sentence structure, the lack of vocabulary, improper punctuation, and poor spelling were additional weaknesses mentioned by fifty per cent of the companies. The questionnaire revealed that the lesser defects in writing are errors in tense, reference of pronouns, use of idiom, parallelism, and agreement of subject and verb.

To prepare more effective writers, industry suggests that instructors in English impress upon the student that each of his writing efforts should be designed and accomplished with the same degree of care and attention to detail that is required of any engineering design. Every flaw weakens the structure and renders the design less valuable. Furthermore, industry offers the following advice: "Stimulate an interest in an appreciation of "quality" professional writing. Then give the student sufficient practice in writing to develop self-confidence. Suggest that students be asked on a voluntary basis to submit for analysis and criticism the technical papers and reports written for other courses. Instill in the student a strong appreciation of the importance of good writing in relation to job advancement."

Specifically, industry makes these recommendations to prepare more effective writers:

1. Emphasize the importance of good grammatical construction and the correct choice of words.
2. Stress the need for complete sentences, a wide vocabulary, correct spelling, and the unity and logic of writing.
3. Create a pride in fashioning sentences that tell a story simply and directly.
4. Stress simplicity of form and necessity for a direct transfer of information.
5. Offer extensive drill on the use of outlines.
6. Provide a basic training in syntax and sentence structure and show the student how to apply this background.

Kinds of Writing and Training

According to the majority of the companies, the kinds of writing which are required by most engineers are internal, technical, and progress reports; letters of inquiry and instruction; laboratory reports; technical articles and papers; abstracts and sales letters. Other types of writing which were mentioned to a lesser degree were the examination-trip report, bid proposals, and technical correspondence.

For your prospective employees what kind of training in writing is most necessary? To this question industry replied as follows:

1. Organization of material in clear, logical sequence.
2. Elimination of unessential material.
3. Development of logical buildup of subject.
4. Expression of ideas in concise form.
5. Training in exactness in choice of words and phrases.
6. Ability to organize and plan before writing.
7. Ability to write brief, complete, and accurate letters.
8. A complete thorough knowledge of English backed by many hours of nonfiction reading.
9. Preparation of good outlines in order that the writing will follow a unified, coherent format.
10. Clarity of expression to insure full comprehension by the second person.

Speech Work

Speech instructors may be interested to learn that business and industry feel that the most important types of speech which a prospective engineer should practice are the conference, dictation, panel discussions, speeches of demonstration, interviews, speeches for

special occasions, and speeches of persuasion. Several answers stated that engineers should learn the art of conversation.

What kind of training do you think that our public speaking instructors should give those students who will enter business and industry? The following were suggested:

1. Practice speaking before groups to gain poise and ability to think on feet.
2. Teach "general conversation."
3. Offer training in expository speaking so that conversations, speeches, and/or explanations will reflect the individual's true knowledge of his subject. This training should eliminate the too frequent "I mean's," "in other words," the now-popular "actually's," which seem to indicate an inferior ability to explain or a lack of confidence on the part of the speaker.
4. Give as much planned and extemporaneous speaking as is possible in order to overcome self-consciousness.

5. Provide sufficient speaking experience to develop confidence and poise.

6. Train him to speak fluently and enthusiastically.

7. Stress extemporaneous and informal talks.

8. Develop logical build-up of subject and ability to summarize adequately.

9. Encourage ease and relaxation of speaker to transfer important points of information.

10. Emphasize the importance of careful and sound planning. Make the student realize that he is speaking for a specific audience, not for himself, and that he should tailor his material and presentation for that audience.

For your prospective employees what kind of training in speaking is most necessary?

1. Ability to speak convincingly.
2. Poise before a group.
3. Ability to make a non-technical man know what you are talking about.
4. A thorough grounding in the fundamentals of English expression.
5. Ability to say just what one intends to say and what one really means.

Herman A. Estrin
Newark College of Engineering

Good Reading

Editor Sherwood Weber of *Good Reading* writes: ". . . Thank you for the nice position in the Critic. The book is going so well that the first printing is gone and a second begun. I have asked Ed Foster (Georgia Tech) to join the Committee as editor of "18th Century American Novels" for the next edition (Dix, the librarian at Princeton, is retiring), and he has accepted . . ."



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The CEA Institute or Institutes will henceforth be known as The Humanities Center, with the subtitle "An Activity of the College English Association, Inc."

Tennessee College English Teachers Conference

That freshman English, including some sort of remedial program, is here to stay was the consensus of the third Tennessee College English Teachers Conference meeting September 11 and 12 at Middle Tennessee State College, Murfreesboro. This Conference, organized by Dr. Charles F. Webb, executive secretary of the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English, divided into workshop groups on freshman English, sophomore English, advanced and graduate courses, speech and drama, and English teacher training. Approximately half the conferees participated in the freshman English workshop in which ideas and practices were shared and where miseries found company.

Shift the Blame?

In achieving their aims of thinking, interpreting, and communicating, various approaches are used in Tennessee colleges. Writing, speaking, reading, and listening were stressed and in that order, though note was taken that one seldom teaches a single skill. The group sought to shift blame for freshman English problems to the high school teacher but was thwarted by the discovery that the meeting had been infiltrated by some high school teachers who forced the college teachers to take a new track, even to being self-critical.

The college, it seems, must continue to bear the impact of too crowded conditions and courses of study in the high schools; it must offer salvage opportunities for entering freshmen. Solutions suggested include homogeneous grouping, laboratory work, smaller classes, lighter loads, and more pay. (By this time the teachers were feeling pretty sorry for themselves.) Most of those present reported they do all their own paper grading and teach three sections of freshmen.

When it was found that the blame for poor language use by freshmen could not be completely shifted to the high school teacher, other departments in the college became the whipping boys. It was felt that English teachers were not getting sufficient help from these other users of the language who should be able to insist on a few simple standards such as the making of complete sentences on tests.

The Research Paper

The research paper as a part of the freshman course found detractors and supporters among those

present. A trend away from a very long and involved paper was evident. Some expressed the hope that high school teachers would stop having such papers written and concentrate more on short theme writing, but the high school teachers present were joined by other college teachers in believing that the discipline of making such an effort was worth the trouble. Strangely, there was little support for the term paper as a training for later college research.

The main concern of those directing research writing did not seem to be footnotes or organization, or bibliography but honesty. Many and ingenious were the devices suggested for catching those who turn in the work of another. It is possible that the FBI can be persuaded to stage a workshop in crime detection for teachers of freshman English.

The action of the Conference in affiliating with the CEA may be interpreted as a realization that all teachers of English need all the affiliated help they can get in doing what is to them a very vital job.

George C. Grise
Austin Peay State College

Dear Editor:

In an ill-advised moment this will help you to recall, you asked me for an informal report on the goings-on in one segment of the Third Tennessee College English Conference, held in Murfreesboro, September 11-12. Well, here it is.

Periodically, in the reconstructed South, a spasm of energy seizes us; and on such occasions Tennesseans, as like as not, work off the agony by holding a coffee-klatch (laced with Jack Daniels), rigging up a political rally (same lacing), or calling a conference (unlaced). I don't know how else to explain the origin of the Tennessee College English Conference, newly affiliated with the C.E.A.

To facilitate exchange of ideas the Third Conference was divided into discussion groups and the delegates were then invited to cast their lot with the group of their choice. Since everyone (but literally everyone) now apparently subscribes to the theory that the tail should wag the dog, there was an instant mass exodus to the freshman section. A handful of mavericks stood up for speech and drama. And a few die-hards, still

unconvinced that the superlative obligation of college English departments is the quest for misplaced commas, correction of misguided spellings, or doctoring of squinting modifiers, soberly trekked off to consider the plight of the undernourished advanced courses. Of which party I made one.

Specific Recommendations

These are the specific recommendations we made and the Conference adopted:

(1) Because most English majors—at least such of our English majors as are not syphoned off into child marriages—ultimately become teachers, and since teachers (even college teachers) must know something about grammar and the English language in general, we recommended that all English majors be required to take a course or courses, on an advanced level, specifically dealing with the development and present character of the English language.

(2) Through the haze of our smoke-filled room we also recognized the obligation, and opportunity, of the English department to provide certain elective courses, essentially advanced "service" courses, looking primarily toward the cultural needs of non-majors. Without spelling out titles for courses, we accordingly recommended doing whatever is possible, within our own departments or in collaboration with the departments of Religion and Classics, to further among our undergraduates a knowledge of their literary heritage in the Bible and in the Classics, especially in mythology.

(3) In view of the high frequency of high-fidelity ignorance of furrin' tongues among our graduate students, we strongly urged, as a minimum, an A.B. competency in at least one foreign language for all M.A. candidates; and we recommended that all prospective candidates for the Ph.D. degree be advised to establish early in their program competency in a second language.

Some Very Good Talk

Our little group then fell to spontaneous discussion of whatever topics lay nearest our interests. We talked. And talked.

Principally, what we had to say centered upon the content and general objectives of the undergraduate program; the relation of the undergraduate to the graduate program; and the present status, among the participating colleges, of the M.A. degree.

We agreed that the most important aim of advanced and graduate courses should be the

development of individuals with an understanding of and appreciation for literature in all its forms. A few tears were shed over the practice, in some of the nation's colleges and universities, of dropping the thesis as a requirement for the master's degree; but the group felt, on the whole, that retention of the thesis was less important than insistence that each individual program for the M.A. (and, incidentally, for the B.A. as well) be a co-ordinated intellectual experience, whether the unification be arrived at through the writing of a thesis, through a comprehensive oral examination, or through other devices designed to encourage the candidate to review and supplement his course work.

During the breaks between sessions there was some whispered discussion in the halls of still another problem: what to do, if anything, about the creeping socialism (or chauvinism, or matricidal ingratuity) of the mushrooming American literature courses in English departments. In the open forum, however, no challenge was raised to the validity of claims to curricular status of such courses as American Criticism from Poe to James, American Expatriate Verse, The American Short Story from O. Henry to —oh, Hemingway, or Great Writers of O'Sullivan County.

In the dying moments of the final session someone apologetically introduced, almost as an after-

(Please turn to p. 8)

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NOON WINE

(Continued from p. 1)
often to accept a realm of discourse which is not customary, or seems quite unreal or artificial.

Calm Opening

One of the virtues of Miss Porter's story is that it begins with deceptive ease. One is immediately aware of a scene, a place, and an atmosphere. The skill of this beginning makes it seem without effort; there are no melodramatics and there is no effort to be explicit at the expense of detail. Miss Porter has balanced the structure of her tale so that its opening section is slowly paced, sparing of details, and apparently without much extraordinary significance.

She leads one into several "traps," each of which is of great value to the student, provided he isn't caught in any one of them permanently. The opening pages have all the aspects of a genre piece, with no value beyond its gift of presentation. The two men, Olaf Helton and Earle Thompson, are presented sparingly, with a suggestion of comedy in a minor key. The steady, precise movements of Helton contrast clearly with the appearance of Thompson, "A tough weather-beaten man with stiff black hair and a week's growth of black whiskers."

Tension of Differences

It is a contrast of basic natures, but at the moment we see it only in suggestive but spare detail. Thompson is "a noisy proud man." His contempt for the job of churning butter (women's work, as he

calls it) is expressed in his manner of undertaking it. From the start, one must note the underlying tension of difference between the two men; they are basically alike (Thompson's straight posture, signifying pride of carriage and an immense self-esteem is in one range of meaning like the stiff, mechanical, all but wordless movements of Helton's approach to him), but they are otherwise and superficially quite unlike each other.

The comedy of the initial scene, quiet and subdued as it is, continues in several pages of narrative exposition. Thompson's speech is hearty, broad, self-sustained; Helton's is terse, clipped, and intense. Neither man sees the other; the only point of meeting is that of their complementary wishes. This attitude of tolerance and pride persists through two-thirds of the story, cutting both of them off from essential communication, yet allowing them to serve each other's needs.

Trapped in Cliches

All of this is presented to us without any suggestion of meaning beyond the immediacy of the scene. We are "trapped" in cliches and it is our job to get beyond their superficiality. The same situation pertains in the relationship of Thompson and his wife. They seem to live in a world of half-polite gestures and remarks. "Don't you linger, now, Mr. Thompson," she says, when he announces a trip into town. "Don't go to the hotel." She meant the saloon; the proprietor also had rooms for rent upstairs."

Miss Porter's description of the Thompson feeling is expertly mild: "She wanted to believe in her husband, and there were too many times when she couldn't. She wanted to believe that tomorrow, or at least the day after, life, such a battle at best, was going to be better."

As I've said, this is all deceptively simple. The reader ought to appreciate the simplicity, but should also be wary of it. Underlying the stereotypes, which mislead the casual reader, severe tensions persist. Miss Porter's mastery lies partly in her presenting these tensions without undue emphasis, giving them in terms of scene, in a sense not really giving them at all.

In fact, Olaf Helton absorbs these tensions into himself; the Thompsons are placated by his obsessive honesty and diligence. They feel superior to him and grateful at one and the same time. The farm recovers, becomes tidy, neat,

and profitable. In sustaining the Thompsons, Helton postpones the crisis of their relationship. But in himself, in what he is and has been, Helton eventually offers the occasion for pathos and tragedy.

Meanings Gradually Revealed

It may be said that Olaf Helton is the tragic means of the story. The basic problem in understanding it is his meaning—what he means to the Thompsons rather than what he means to himself. He is, first of all, the instrument of Mr. Thompson's pride. Because he performs his tasks with an obsessive efficiency and scrupulousness, he preserves Mr. Thompson's dignity, recovers for him his prestige, and makes possible a nine-year period of peace and ease in the family relationship.

The deeper meaning of the story is only slowly revealed. It is suggested in several ways, which at the time seem not especially important. The matter of the harmonicas, which surely indicates a kind of imbalance, is a clue. The fixed, rigid, almost mad sullenness with which Helton rejects Mrs. Thompson's invitation to a church meeting is another. The methodical ferocity with which he punishes the Thompson boys for their having fouled his harmonicas is a third.

But these are not sensed for what they are or intend. They are mere "crotchets" or evidence of "crankiness": "The point was, to find out just how Mr. Helton's crankiness was different from any other man's, and then get used to

it, and let him feel at home." Both Thompsons have depths of character of which they are quite unaware; they prefer to take refuge in simple explanations, superficialities. This is all very proper, very correct. Miss Porter is wise in leaving the story at this phase as a body scene-painting, with only a slight suggestion of hidden meaning.

Pointing Ahead

After this narration, by all odds the longest of the story's three phases, there is a brief summing up, very acute, very plain, and yet very subtle in its slight gesture of pointing ahead: "Mr. Helton was the hope and the prop of the family, and all the Thompsons became fond of him, or at any rate they ceased to regard him as in any way peculiar, and looked upon him, from a distance they did not know how to bridge, as a good man and a good friend."

Here, and in the words that immediately follow, we are given the clearest indication of the Thompson deficiency. The Thompsons are more than "fond of" Helton; they depend upon him for their very substance and prosperity. He has given her peace of mind; he has offered her husband the chance to live in dignity as he sees dignity, free of the complications and humility of "women's work."

Eruption

The story suddenly erupts into violence and meaning. The "second act" of its dramatic scheme is quick, sudden, and violent. In as

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THE CEA CRITIC

Page Seven

tense a passage as one may find in modern fiction, the tone of the story changes radically and the irony gives way to anguish and pathos. The reader is here challenged to do the best he can with what he has been able to make of the opening scenes.

While they had been placid, mildly comical, and only suggestive, this new scene is rapid, rich, dense with meaning, and complex. Thompson's ignorance of himself, and his refusal to admit himself, now leads to terror and crisis. The setting and atmosphere are appropriately unbearably uncomfortable. The heat of the August day becomes a living agent of the narration. There is a slight repetition of the opening scene: another stranger arrives at the gate, but he enters another kind of farmyard, one that is a tribute to Helton's scrupulous workmanship.

The reader must be alert to every detail in the following pages, because all details are significant. The new stranger, Homer T. Hatch, is there to explain Helton to Thompson, a service which Thompson wants least of all to have. The dialogue that follows is masterly. There is no sympathy wasted on Hatch; no one can admire him for what he is here to do. But he is here in the role of devil's judge, and every gesture, every remark, serves as a kind of grotesque parody of Thompson's own nature. It is as though Thompson were gazing at himself in a mirror until he can no longer stand himself. The harmonicas, the tune which had become a necessary part of life on the farm, Helton's past—are all here suddenly revealed to us.

But more important, Helton's own obsession has now been assimilated by Thompson. The story of the noon wine song is now not the motif underlying Helton's past but a precise and terrible symbol of Thompson's own nature. "That's a kind of Scandahooian song," says Hatch. "Where I come from they sing it a lot. In North Dakota, they sing it. It says something about starting out in the morning feeling so good you can't hardly stand it, so you drink up all your likker before noon. All the likker, you understand, that you was saving for the noon lay-off. The words aren't much, but it's a pretty tune. It's a kind of drinking song."

Failure of Self-Knowledge

I believe Miss Porter intends this song to explain Thompson rather than Helton. The "likker" is his good luck on which Thompson has been nourished since Helton's arrival, upon which he now has come to depend with a peculiar violence.

It is this dependence, this crude assertion of a violent nature, which is morally defective, that leads to his delusion when Hatch is killed.

The death scene is itself deliberately hedged; Thompson vaguely sees its possibility, but sees it only in terms of his need to rationalize for it. Here Thompson's failure of self-knowledge is truly terrifying; at the moment of greatest danger, he thinks of superficial reasons. There is a pathetic similarity between these and Mrs. Thompson's reflections over the "crotches" of hired men. "It doesn't pay to be friendly with strangers from another part of the country. They're always up to something, or they'd stay at home where they belong."

The murder is itself played out on the level of delusive action. At this moment of action without precise awareness, Thompson sees things that do not exist, that have not happened. He becomes both himself and Helton, and the knife that he sees going into Helton's stomach is metaphorically aimed at him. He kills Hatch crudely, bluntly, ("as if he were stunning a beef,") protectively, to save the self that he had become in the nine years of Helton's tenure on his farm.

Final Act

This is all very difficult, but it is a difficulty that has slowly grown from the very texture of the earlier scenes. And it prepares the way for the final act of the story. Thompson's search for absolute vindication, for proof of his mistaken judgment of himself, is presented now and finally. The madness which before seemed merely "temper" is now become overt. It is a madness that his wife had sometimes uncomfortably sensed but only vaguely defined to herself.

But it is also pathos, and in enduring it Thompson acquires some tragic dignity. The suicide which ends the story is rich in that pathos. This clumsy, grotesque, violent man has now arrived at the final necessity to prove himself. Unequal throughout the story to the need to see himself directly, he is here playing out the drama to its only conclusion.

We may make many inferences from this brilliant piece of fiction. Superficially it is a tragedy of the failure of self-awareness. This failure becomes the delusion of murder and suicide. The murder is an act of self-defense, with the self not known; the suicide is an act of violent supererogation.

But the great advantage of *Noon Wine* is in the mastery of its tell-

ing: The variation of pace, the discretion with respect to explaining motives, the gradual implicitness of its levels of meaning (which are never purely symbolic, always conscientiously psychological), the remarkable skill of accumulation which gives the scenes their naturalness and allows for one's absorbing them slowly and with respect for their meaning.

Avoid Beforehand Explanation

I believe that the best method of teaching *Noon Wine* is to induct the student into its successive scenes at the pace dictated by its style and with no recourse to beforehand explanations. The student needs to experience the tale, to puzzle over the murder as Mr. Thompson does, to review its beginnings in the retrospect provided by its conclusion.

As for the story's place in Miss Porter's work, that may come later, or it may even be suggested earlier, in a lecture on her other work, her interest in her craft, her scrupulous avoidance of overt and abstract generalities about the nature of man. The experience of *Noon Wine* lies in reading it in the rhythms of understanding that its style and form dictate.

Readers have complained that this is after all a "trivial tale," that it lacks the majesty of Thomas Mann's ideological ingratiations of human depravity, the metaphysical pathos of Melville's analyses of human loneliness. But we are

sometimes led to recognize that commonplaces pay their own tributes to the horrifying disciplines the human suffers in order to make his survival appear dignified. Miss Porter has here accomplished what seems to me the most difficult of all tasks—she has made us see that tragedy is at times after all a consequence of the ways in which circumstances limit our acts.

Frederick J. Hoffman
University of Wisconsin

Leland Miles, Hanover College, whose article "William Carlos Williams" appeared in the May, 1953 CEA Critic, has published a book, *Americans Are People and Other Assertions*, which includes as one of its chapters a revised and enlarged version of the Critic article under the heading "Weekend with a Modern Poet." The book treats a number of educational problems and the function of literature in modern society in such chapters, for example, as "Why Worry about Wordsworth?" and "Ulysses or Lotos Eater? The Meaning of Liberal Education." The book is published by Bookman Associates — Twayne Publishers, Inc.

Putnam F. Jones has been made Dean of the Graduate Faculty at the University of Pittsburgh. He is also serving as Acting Dean of the College.

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NEW ENGLAND CEA

(Continued from p. 1)

Harvard, and MIT, and the striking contrasts among these methods were eagerly discussed. Walter Gibson of Amherst stated that Amherst requires each student to write a short paper for each class, based squarely on his own experience. The aim of this discipline is to train the students to examine and talk about experience. Newman Birk of Tufts linked composition with general education, claiming that work in reading as well as in writing is necessary to give the grasp of thoughts, feelings, and things which colleges require of their upper classmen. Richard Ohmann, Harvard, described the composition course at Harvard as neither in nor out of general education. The emphasis is on clear thinking; reading and writing are used to provide training in definition, assertion, and proving, and later in diction, perspective, tone, coherence, and control. The writing is about really big and serious ideas—the nature of the hero, the meaning of pain, the necessity of revolution. Norman N. Holland (MIT) outlined a course which is both writing and literature. The compositions grow organically from a study of the foundations of western civilization. Specific cultural case studies are made, for example, of 5th Century B. C. Athens, or 13th Century France. A poet, a historian, and a philosopher from each period are studied. The attempt is to achieve a "space-time outlook matrix." A data-inference-conclusion sequence is often used for the written work; for example, in *Antigone* first a theme on "What Did Creon Do?" Then a theme on "What Was the Effect of Creon's Actions on the Thebans?" And finally, "What Was the Significance of Creon in *Antigone* as a Whole?"

A session on "Teaching the Novel" allowed Gerald W. Brace of Boston University, a practicing novelist, to discuss questions of form versus content with Norman Friedman, Univ. of Conn., a practicing critic, with Wisner P. Kinne of Tufts as moderator. Much of the discussion revolved around a comparison of *Great Expectations* with *The Great Gatsby*, with Prof. Brace accusing the latter of thinness in characterization and Prof. Friedman defending it on the basis of structure. A course in the novel may be a historical survey of the form, Prof. Brace pointed out, a study of the biography and development of a single novelist, a period course, or a study of the novel as a work of art. Prof. Friedman

defended the value of the last type of course. But Prof. Brace raised the question why, if form is so important, the English novel, which is often so badly written, should be so generally regarded as the world's greatest. Does not the English novel derive its strength from something other than form? To which Prof. Friedman rejoined that form is not a question of tidiness but rather an organic question: do the parts fit the whole?

In the very appropriate setting of a TV studio (WGBH-TV) the conferees listened to Lawrence Creshkoff of the WGBH staff and P. Albert Duhamel of Boston College, a practicing TV lecturer, discuss "Problems in Literary presentations to the General TV Audience." The path to successful educational TV, Mr. Creshkoff said, is definitely not in the direction of cheapening or popularization. Dash must be added to the presentation, but it must remain solid and authoritative. The tendency of teachers to wash their hands of TV he deplored as unrealistic, escapist, and dangerous. TV affects us all, whether we watch it or not, and so we can not avoid its influence. But both speakers agreed that TV is still in its infancy. The ideal uses for this new medium, its own particular forms, have not yet been discovered. It will never do away with the good teacher, Prof. Duhamel maintained; when it finds itself it will do something that no other medium has ever done before. Perhaps its role will be to dramatize the conflict of minds, something so essential to teaching but so hard to achieve in the classroom. In this field English teachers may make a special contribution to this art of the future, since the dramatization of conflict lies closer to their discipline than to any other.

The conference contained concurrent sessions on "Problems of the College Theater," "American Studies," and "Teaching Poetry" which this reporter could not attend. Other reporters did attend them, however, and we hope will report. A final note: the beauty of the new Kresge Auditorium in which the sessions were held and the organ concert in the new chapel added greatly to the spirit of the day.

At the business meeting NE CEA's president Fred Millet (Wesleyan) presided and announced that the spring meeting will be at Bowdoin. Harry Moore (Babson) was elected second vice-president, and new directors were Caesar Barber (Amherst), Bernard Farragher (Boston College), and Alexander Cowie (Wesleyan).

TENNESSEE CONFERENCE

(Continued from p. 5)

thought, a topic of central consequence—methods of teaching students how to comprehend sympathetically, how to savor independently, the poetry they read. No amount of theory or analysis, it was pointed out, can convey this appreciation to dull ears and unimaginative, sluggish minds. With such resistant material, the only solution seems to be that of Montaigne: to make pastry-cooks of them or, lacking witnesses, mercifully to drown them. But with the sensitive and responsive probably the best, perhaps the only, method is the oral-aural method. It is now possible to have the student listen, text open before him, to recordings of poets reading their own verse, or to other competent renderings by skilled readers. In the absence of these aids, and even when they are available to him, the instructor must himself be prepared to read aloud with interpretive understanding and with all the tonal skill he can manage. This is well and good, if the instructor is not himself a mechanical clod and a set of fossilized notes, and if his voice is a sufficiently tuned and controlled instrument. But the thought of Spenser or Milton or Keats being intoned in the high nasal plangency of East Tennessee is enough to make strong men quake.

Hovering on the brink of that horrific surmise, we chastened delegates withdrew to brood upon the rashness of our suggestion.

Cordially yours,
John Leon Lievsay
University of Tennessee

Some last-minute typesetting errors crept into the item about the Tennessee CEA on p. 8 of the Oct. Critic. Richard Peck is at Middle Tennessee State College, not at the University of Tennessee; and Dean Leonard Beach of Vanderbilt is a member of the advisory board, not Leonard Black. We ask Tenn. CEA to pardon us these errors.

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The North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia CEA Meeting held on Oct. 20 at East Carolina College in Greenville, N. C., consisted of a panel discussion on the topic "Problems of Teaching Literature in College," chaired by M. N. Posey of East Carolina College, and of a series of discussion groups on problems raised by the panel. James Poindexter, president of the regional group, was in charge of the meeting, not Edgar W. Hirshberg as was erroneously stated in the October Critic. Prof. Hirshberg was a member of the committee on arrangements.

By-Law Amendments

The following amendments to the By-Laws have been proposed and will be brought up for a vote at the annual meeting, 28 Dec., in Washington.

In Article V, Officers, change the first sentence by inserting after the words "a Treasurer," "an Executive Editor." Also insert the following sentence before the last sentence of the article: "The Executive Editor shall serve for a term of three years and may be re-elected for consecutive terms without restriction."

In Article VI, Elections, change the next-to-last sentence to read: "The Executive Director, the Treasurer, and the Executive Editor shall be elected by the Board of Directors."

In Article XI, Publications, change the words "editor or managing editor" to "Executive Editor."

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